

## **"Sonic Arts of Islam"**

**Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy**

**(Distinguished Visiting Professor  
from Egypt)**

and the

**Inshad Ensemble**

present

**Vocal Arts from the Islamic Tradition**

**Thursday, March 17, 2005**

**at 8:00 pm**

Reception to follow

Made possible through the University of Alberta

EFF Distinguished Visitor Fund

Sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology  
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with Smithsonian Folkways and the Department of Music



Convocation  
Hall

Arts Building  
University of Alberta



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## Program

*Adhan* (the Islamic call to prayer), performed by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy

*Tilawat al-Qur'an al-Karim* (recitation of the Glorious Koran), performed by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy

*Anashid Diniyya wa Sufiyya* (Religious and Sufi Hymns)

*Qawa'id al-Islam* (the principles of Islam). Poetry by Shaykh 'Abd al-Salam Hamza; melody by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy. Performed by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy and the Inshad Ensemble.

*Ya Rabbi Ad'uka fi Sirri wa I'lani* (Oh Lord, I call You, inwardly and outwardly). Poetry by Shaykh 'Abd al-Salam Hamza. Solo vocal improvisation (*ibtihalat*) by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy.

*Ya Sa'ilan Ayna al-Tariq* (Oh seeker of the way). Poetry by Shaykh 'Abd al-Salam Hamza; melody by Jamal al-Tajuri. Performed by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy and the Inshad Ensemble.

*Ya Rabbi Mali fi al-Wujud Siwaka* (Oh Lord, I have nothing but You). Poetry by Shaykh 'Abd al-Salam Hamza. Solo vocal improvisation (*ibtihalat*) by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy.

*Subhanak* (Glory be to You). Poetry by al-Imam al-Radi; melody by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy. Performed by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy and the Inshad Ensemble.

*Li fi Nawaluka Ya Mawlaya Amalu* (Oh Lord, reaching You is my hope). Poetry by al-Imam al-Bur'i. Solo vocal improvisation (*ibtihalat*) by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy.

*Ya Maryam al-'Azra'* (Oh Virgin Mary). Poetry and melody by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy. Performed by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy and the Inshad Ensemble.

*Zidni*. (Increase my bewilderment with your abundant love). Poetry by al-Imam 'Umar ibn al-Farid. Solo vocal improvisation (*ibtihalat*) by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy.

*Tala' al-Nahar 'ala al-Aqmar* (Day broke upon the moons). Traditional Sufi poetry. Melody by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy. Performed by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy and the Inshad Ensemble, following introductory solo improvisation on poetry by al-Imam 'Abd al-Rahim al-Bur'i.

## Intermission

*Al-Mawlid al-Nabawi al-Sharif* (The noble Prophet's birth). Text by al-Imam al-Radi. Solo vocal improvisation by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy.

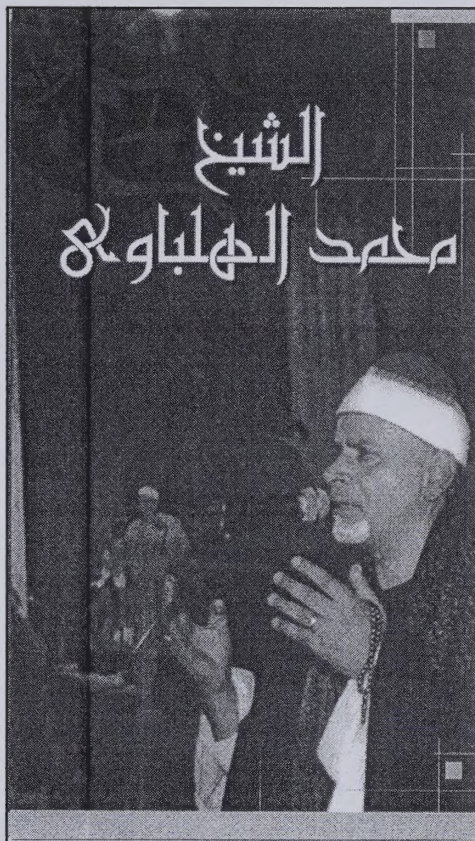
*Ashraquat Anwar Muhammad* (The Lights of Muhammad Shone). Melody by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy. Performed by Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy and the Inshad Ensemble.



**Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy** is an Egyptian master of the traditional Arabo-Islamic vocal arts, and a highly versatile artist. Besides being widely acclaimed in the arts of Qur'anic recitation (*tajwid*) and the call to prayer (*adhan*), Shaykh el-Helbawy also excels in the venerable art of *inshad dini* (religious hymnody). These melodically intricate chants include improvisatory solo supplications called *ibtihalat*, and a composed repertoire known as *tawashih diniyya*, featuring elaborate counterpoint between solo and group. Shaykh el-Helbawy has also memorized a vast corpus of the mystical hymnody accompanying Sufi rituals (*inshad Sufi*), and has mastered the traditional tonal resources of Arab music (*maqamat*).

For hundreds of years, these Arabo-Islamic vocal arts have carried powerful spiritual meaning for Muslims. Until recently, they have also provided fundamental musical training to generations of singers—including the most famous diva of the Arab world, Umm Kulthum—whose vocal talents were first recognized and honed through *tajwid*, *adhan*, and *inshad*. Today Shaykh el-Helbawy is one of only a handful of performers across the Arab world excelling in all of these genres, and he stands today as their principal Egyptian exponent.

Shaykh el-Helbawy was born in Cairo in 1946. He memorized the entire Qur'an at an early age, and received the *Ijazat al-Tajwid* (permission to teach Qur'anic recitation) from the Azhar Islamic university (founded 972 CE) while still a youth. Subsequently, he studied Arab music theory and practice with the well-known Egyptian musicologist, Dr Suleiman Gamil. He learned *inshad dini* through collaborations with its greatest exponents in modern times, including Shaykh Taha al-Fashni, Shaykh Sayyid al-Naqshabandi, Shaykh Nasr al-Din



Tubar, and Shaykh Muhammad Umran. He has also studied Islamic vocal performance styles from other regions in the Islamic world, especially the Levant, Turkey, the Gulf, and Iran. In 1980 he formed the Sufi Hymns Group (*Firqat al-Inshad al-Sufi*), comprising a chorus, percussion, and reed flute. Besides numerous performances in Cairo and Alexandria, this group has toured extensively abroad, performing in the Middle East and in Europe, including France, Italy, and Germany. Likewise, a number of his compact disc recordings have been highly acclaimed, as was his performance on "Mozart in Egypt". For many years Shaykh el-Helbawy was the principal religious singer, Qur'an reciter, and teacher for the Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya mosque and Sufi order, in Cairo. Since 1979, he has been certified by Egyptian National Radio, which often broadcasts his recitations and hymnody from the principal mosques of Cairo, and is the

designated reciter and hymnodist for the Higher Council for Sufi Orders in Egypt. He is an acknowledged specialist in the art of *taswir*: word painting, using the tonal resources of Arab melody, and continues to renew the traditions of *tawashih* via his own compositions in this genre.

Besides these accomplishments, Shaykh el-Helbawy is also an active and accomplished teacher, having trained a number of students and groups. In Cairo he teaches regularly at the Hifni Institute for Music, to Egyptians and foreigners alike, and he has often been invited to lecture abroad (most recently in Iran). He has written several scholarly papers, including "*al-Mufid fi Fann al-Tajwid*" and "*al-Taswir al-Naghmi fi al-Nusus al-Qur'aniyya wa al-Tawashih*".

Through musical appreciation and participation comes cultural understanding and respect, grounded in deeply felt experience. Facilitating intercultural musical experience is therefore an important "applied" aspect of musical research and study. It is anticipated that Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy's performances, lectures, and workshops will greatly enhance non-Muslims' appreciation of the values and achievements of the Islamic and Arab worlds, while also helping Canadian Muslims and Arabs to better understand part of their own cultural heritage.



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